INTRODUCTION-ALABAMA'S EARLY ROADS

Indian Trails to Interstates: The History of Alabama's Road System is a descriptive synthesis of primary and secondary materials on the development of the Alabama road system from the first known Indian paths which were followed by the initial explorers of the state to the current network of Interstate highways. The road is the central element of the chronological narrative, but the travelers along the road, the travelers' means of conveyance, and institutional developments of road travel and road use are also surveyed. In the twentieth century, a major section concerns the evolution of Alabama's Highway Department from the first Highway Commission in 1911 to the present Highway Department.

An attempt was made to integrate regional and national developments into the Alabama narrative, particularly when the Alabama and Southern or the Alabama and American experience was similar. Thus the "Frontier and Antebellum Travel" section is a summary of Southern as well as Alabama conditions and the "Nineteenth century Roads" chapter outlines and evolutionary and revolutionary development, national in scope. In fact, the history of road systems worldwide suggests that the road is more of an instrument of national or even international influence than of local or provincial import. This is not to say that Alabama does not have distinctive features, but that, in the history of the State's roads, the regional and national factors are often of equal or greater significance. The role of federal aid in the evolution of Alabama's road system is a case in point. The reluctance of local people to finance their own roads, in other states as well as Alabama, suggests that federal aid will play an even greater role in the future of the "road."

The significance of the road is captured--though perhaps overstated--by Hilaire Belloc in The Road (London, 1924):

> Not only is the Road one of the great human institutions because it is fundamental to social existence, but also because its varied effect appears in every department of the State. It is the Road which determines the sites of many cities and the growth and nourishment of all. It is the Road which controls the development of strategics and fixes the sites of battles. It is the Road which gives its frame-work to all economic development. It is the Road which is the channel of all trade and, what is more important, of all ideas. In its most humble function it is a necessary guide without which progress from place to place would be a ceaseless experiment: it is a sustenance without which organized society would be impossible; thus, and with those other characters I have mentioned, the Road moves and controls all history.

Mobile historian Peter J. Hamilton agreed: "No more important study can be found than that of the early roads, for along them poured immigration which has claimed the Southwest (current Southeast) for the Anglo-Saxon civilization."

Nor has the road been a monopoly of Anglo-Saxon or western civilization. The wheel, "crowning achievement of prehistoric carpentry" according to prehistory specialist V. Gordon Chide, was invented in the Near East between 4000 and 3000 B. C., and by 2500 B. C. had spread across Europe to Denmark. Prior to 1500 B. C. there were roads in Mesopotamia, India, and on Malta and Crete in the Mediterranean. The streets of Babylon had stone tracks to accommodate carts with a four to seven-foot wheelbase (five being the most common) in the same era. The wheelbase was the most efficient one for hauling with a double team harnessed abreast and to this day we conform to this approximate span, for vehicular traffic on highways and on railroads. The Royal Road of Persia, built about 500 B. C., extended for 1,500 miles, following the most efficient route and bypassing most of the principal cities in the manner of the modern Interstate. The Roman roads (300 B. C.-300 A. D.) Were even more impressive, a

network of 50,000 miles of primary roads dominated by military use, and perhaps twice as many secondary roads, primarily for local and commercial use. The Roman roads, in addition to spreading the Empire, also diffused the Latin language and the Christian religion. China had roads in the 400-300 B. C. Era but as one historian noted: "In China a road is good for seven years, then bad for 4000 years." Apparently the Chinese were no more inclined to maintain their roads than Alabamians of the late nineteenth century.

The Valtherberg Road in Holland (about 1500 B.C.) was built by using log stringers on which were fastened three-inch wooden planks. Thus, the "plank roads" of antebellum Alabama were anticipated by more then 3000 years. In a similar way the burnt-clay roads of Mississippi, the much talked about road methodology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had their predecessors in 800 B.C. in roads of the same type in India. Pre-Columbian American Indian civilizations, the Mayas and the Incas, did not have wheeled vehicles, but they did have improved roads. The Mayas of Central America had limited roads in cities, apparently for ceremonial purposes, but the Incas a 2,000 mile highway in present day Peru and Ecuador.

After the "Dark Ages" and the "Middle Ages," the new centralized governments encouraged major road building efforts and, in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France and England took the lead. France focused on military roads with strong governmental backing for their construction while England, with a commercial emphasis, left much of the effort to private enterprise in the form of the turnpike company. Outstanding roadbuilders such as John L. McAdams (1756-1836) and Thomas Telford (1757-1834) emerged from the English turnpike era. McAdam's name was synonymous with improved road surfaces in the nineteenth century and his roads contributed the stagecoach heyday. Telford, the "Colossus of Roads," laid out major

English roads and outlined modern techniques of roadbuilding. Subsequent steam-powered highway transport in England seemed to herald English supremacy in land as well as sea transportation, but the stagecoach and railroad interests got a "Red Flag Law" through Parliament in 1866 which effectively curtailed the advance of the steam-powered vehicles. The Act limited speeds to four miles per hour and required a man with a red flag to walk ahead of the vehicle. In a similar way Alabamians of the 1920's limited taxi transport in Birmingham by outlawing the taxi-like "jitney."

The Anglo-Saxon and non-Anglo-Saxon heritage of road building is duly noted but the present concentrates on the American and Alabamian contributions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Governor of the Alabama Territory (1817- 1819) and first Governor of Alabama, William Wyatt Bibb, selected two areas of state emphasis - education and internal improvements - and his focus in terms of state-level government concern has been followed by Alabama governors, and the State Highway officials from 1911 to the present, have faced a continual problem in the roads building phase of internal improvements - new road demands imposed by technological in vehicular transportation. Wagons dictated widening the Indian's trails; stagecoaches and Conestoga wagons (with teamsters chewing and smoking wrapped tobacco leaves called "Stoga" and later "stogies") called for improved wagon road (the best being macadamized roads of crushed rock); and the automobile "paved the way" for modern highways. To the credit of Alabama roadbuilders, they have followed the Englishman McAdam's dictum: "Roads must be built to accommodate the traffic, not the traffic regulated to preserve the roads." With proper financing this practice will likely be continued.

Alabama's roads development can, with cooperative action, continue to overcome the

temporary obstacles to a progressive road program and make the contemporary road system a matter of history in the near future. To this proposition, Indian Trails to Interstates ... is dedicated.

EUROPEAN EXPLORERS SETTLES IN ALABAMA, 1507-1813

Five flags have flown over Alabama: the French (1702-1763); the British (1763-1780); the Spanish (1780-1813); the Unites States (1813-1861; 1865-present); and the Confederate (1861-1865). The Spanish were the first explore the coast and interior of Alabama, but the French made the first permanent settlement.

Although the Alabama coastline was accurately portrayed on European maps as early as 1507, the first known Spanish explorer of the Alabama coast was Alonzo de Pineda, who entered Mobile Bay in 1519. Pineda was followed by Panfilo de Narvaez (1528), Hernando de Soto (1540), Guido de las Bazares (1558), and Tristan de Luna (1559-1561). The most thorough exploration was by de Soto in 1539-1541.

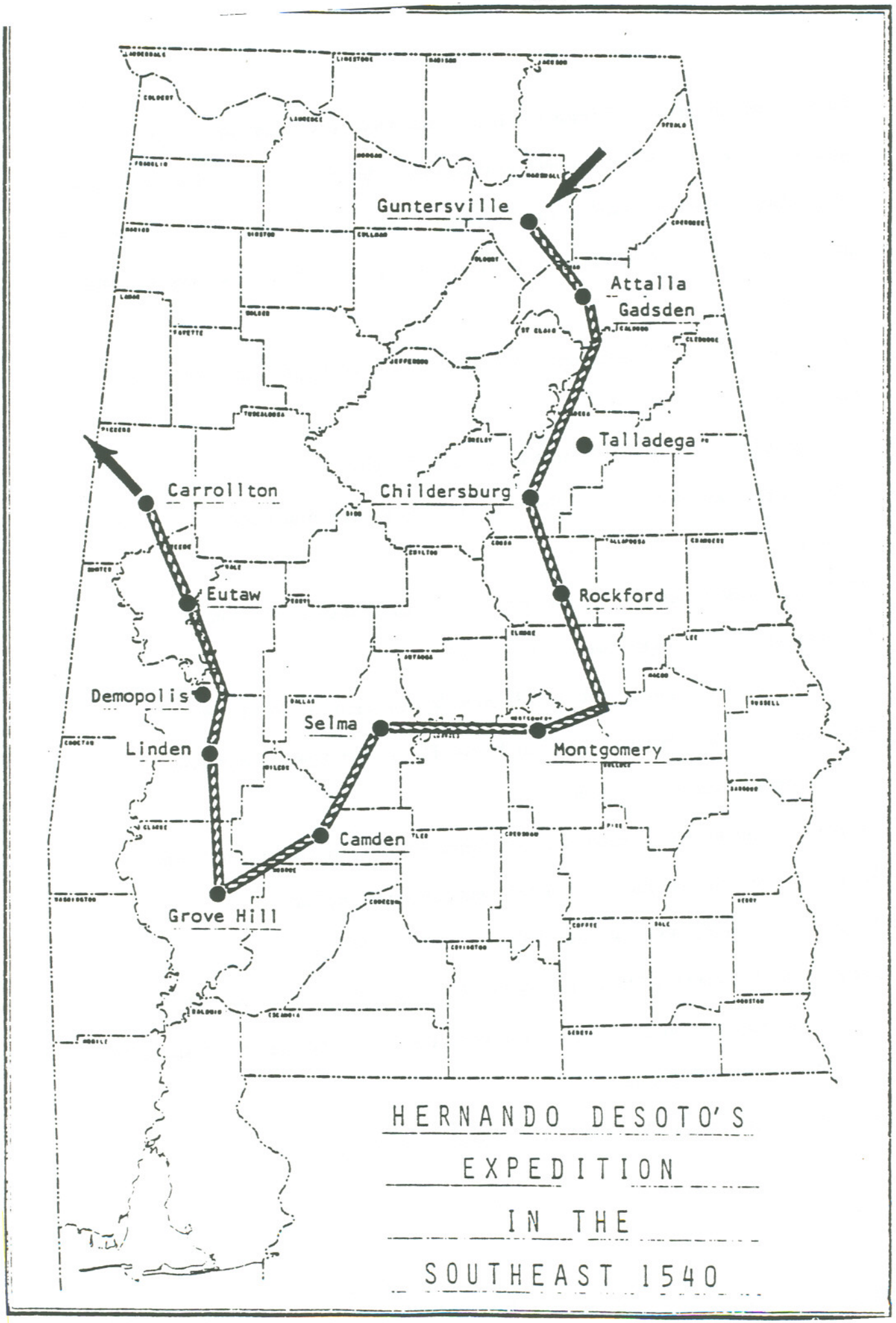
Pineda entered Mobile Bay in 1519 with four ships and named it Bahia Espiritu Santo - the Bay of the Holy Ghost. He explored the Bay and the Mobile River north of it for a month before re-entering the Gulf.

Almost 400 men accompanied Narvaez's expedition from his fleet, Narvaez had five horsehide boats built to traverse the Gulf Coast to Mexico, which he thought was a short distance away. They landed near Mobile Bay before proceeding westward to the mouth of the Mississippi

River where they were swept to sea. Two members of Narvaez's party lived to become a significant part of the more comprehensive de Soto expedition, to follow: Juan Ortiz, who was captured by the Indians but survived to learn their languages and to be rescued by de Soto and serve as his interpreter; and Cabeza de Vaca, who eventually found his way to Mexico. De Vaca's account of his wanderings encouraged de Soto's expedition to the Southeast.

Hernando de Soto, a veteran of the Pizarro expedition to Peru, arrived at Tampa Bay in May 1539. Approximately four years later, the surviving half of the expedition arrived in Mexico. In that four years the Spanish explored Florida, Georgia, parts of the Carolinas and Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.

John Swaton's Report of the de Soto Commission (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1939) is the acknowledges authority of de Soto's expedition. In constructing its estimates of de Soto's route, the Commission had three diaries to compare for specific locations and time, distance and direction of travel. With this cumulative information, they constructed an approximate route (more exact in some places than others) and, in some cases, one or more possible routes. Although four centuries had passed when the Commission did its work, the detailed Spanish accounts allowed for more specific conclusions than any other Southeastern exploration in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. As a result, several historians have drawn one-line routes (based on the major route the Commission endorsed for being the most likely one). Many accounts, and at least one map--in Historical Atlas of Alabama (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974)--have hypothesized where de Soto traveled in relationship to contemporary locations. Thus, de Soto's route was from Guntersville to Carrolton, Alabama via Gadsden , Childersburg, Montgomery, Selma, Camden, Grove Hill, Linden and Eutaw. As de


Guntersville
Attalla
Gadsden
Talladega
Carrollton
Childersburg
Eutaw
Rockford
Demopolis
Selma
Montgomery
Linden
Camden
Grove Hill
HERNANDO DESOTO'S
EXPEDITION
IN THE
SOUTHEAST 1540

Soto followed the line of least resistance, Indian trails in most cases, and early roadbuilders generally widened the trails by cutting the trees on each side, and in turn were followed by later roadbuilders, the authors thought it would be interesting and roughly accurate to plot a specific hypothesized route along current major and minor highways of Alabama. This was done with the following results:

U.S. 72 Southwest from Chattanooga into Alabama through Bridgeport and Stevenson to Scottsboro.

AL 79 from Scottsboro through Columbus City to Guntersville.

U.S. 431 from Guntersville through Albertville, Boaz, Sardis City, Mountainboro and Attalla to Gadsden.

AL 77 from Gadsden through Rainbow City, Southside and Ohatchee to Lincoln.

U.S. 78 from Lincoln through Riverside to Pell City.

U.S. 231 from Pell City through Cropwell, London, Vincent, Harpersville, Childersburg, Sylacauga, Stewartville, Hanover, Rockford, Pentonville and Wetumpka to Montgomery.

U.S. 31 from Montgomery to Prattville.

AL 14 from Prattville through Autaugaville, Mulberry, Burnsville and Brantley to Selma.

AL 41 from Selma through Sardis, Shepardville and Camden to Dry Forks.

Wilcox County 12 from Dry Forks through Coy to Lower Peach Tree.

Clarke County 33 from Lower Peach Tree through Fulton to U.S. 43 near Grove Hill.

U.S. 43 near Grove Hill through Thomasville, Dixon Mills, Linden, Providence, Old Spring Hill, Demopolis and Forkland to Eutaw.

AL 14 from Eutaw through Clinton and Pleasant Ridge to Aliceville.

AL 17 from Aliceville to Carrollton.

Pickens County 26 to Pickens County 75 to Ethelsville on U.S. 82.

U.S. 82 through Ethelsville and Stafford towards Columbus, Mississippi.

Of course, modern roadbuilders had more variables to consider in plotting a route than the animals who made the original trails or the Indians and early explorers who followed them: the necessity of connecting the various county seats; direct routing on a long distance basis (the Interstate System and primary road system of Alabama); local right-of-way problems; man-made obstructions to the natural path (e.g., dams and their backwater); available equipment, materials and financing to construct a road to the specifications required at the time the road was built; and various other economic and political considerations. Technological innovations have also made it possible to improve natural and traditional routing from one place to another. These cumulative variables suggest that the specific route of de Soto does not parallel modern highways. However, considering the economic development along the traditional routes (town location, etc.) and the political power engendered by this economic development, it is likely that the general routes of local roads change very gradually through the years. Thus each roadbuilder roughly followed the route laid out by his predecessor and de Soto's route traced along current roads is probably generally accurate.

De Soto's visit to the Southeast was the most significant of the Spanish expeditions as it was larger and traversed more terrain. It was especially important to the land to be called Alabama (more than two and a half centuries later) because the records of the Spanish constitute our main source of information on the geography and Indian life of "Alabama" in the sixteenth century. In fact, other than the limited records of a couple of minor Spanish return visits, the de

Soto records remain the standard reference point of Alabama history until the arrival of the French a century and a half later.

Two Spanish conquistadors to follow in the wake of de Soto were Guido de las Bazares and Tristan de Luna. Bazares visited Mobile Bay in late 1558 and de Luna arrived in the same locale the following fall (1559). Bazares' stay was brief, but de Luna brought 500 soldiers and 1,000 civilians with the aim of establishing a Gulf Coast colony. When eight of his thirteen ships were destroyed by a hurricane soon after landing, de Luna's colony was forced to subsist on supplies sent by Velasco, the Viceroy of Mexico, and whatever they could coerce from the local Indians. When the local Indians fled, de Luna sent a party to the Indian village of "Coosa" (near Childersburg in Talladega County). They successfully acquired provisions from the Coosa after fighting with them against enemies to the west. The "Coosa" party rejoined the main body (which moved from Mobile Bay to the lower Alabama River valley near present day Claiborne in Monroe County) and, in 1561, returned to Spain. Their two-year sojourn had been eventful, but not profitable.

Between the de Luna colonizing endeavor and the French founding of Biloxi, Mississippi, in 1699, the Spanish founded: St. Augustine in 1565 (first permanent settlement in the United States); Fort Apalachicola on the Alabama side of the Chattahoochee River some twelve miles south of Phenix City in 1689 (held until 1691); and a colony at Pensacola in 1698.

The Le Nayne brothers of France, Iberville and Bienville, made the first permanent settlement in Alabama at Mobile in 1702. The first site of Mobile was at Twenty-Seven Mile Bluff and was named "Fort Louis de la Mobile" for Louis XIV and a tribe of nearby Indians. In 1709, the original town of Mobile was flooded, and the colonists moved downriver, where they

established a second Fort Louis de la Mobile. The city of Mobile grew around this fort.

The French began construction on a stone and brick fort in 1717 to replace the original log stockade. The moved the capital of Louisiana from Mobile to New Orleans in 1722, but Mobile remained an important possession to the French. In 1724, they changed the name if the fort from Fort Louis de la Mobile to Fort Conde.

The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ceded West Florida, of which Mobile was then a part, to the British, who sent a garrison from Pensacola to occupy the fort. The British renamed it Fort Charlotte in honor of the reigning British queen, wife of George III, and held the fort for seventeen years, but were forced to relinquish it to Spain after being besieged by Don Bernardo de Galvez in 1780. The Americans gained control of the fort in 1813, but because the fort had lost much of its strategic value they like the Spanish before them, allowed it to deteriorate.

The fort, basically rectangular, had bastion, about 360 feet apart, on each corner. Surrounded by a dry moat and log fence, its sandstone walls stood twenty feet high and seven feet thick. The main gate, opening onto the parade ground, sat in the northern curtain wall and the soldiers' barracks paralleled the eastern and western walls. Three wells supplied the fort with water from the mouths of the northwest, southwest, and southeast bastions. The bakehouse was in the northwest corner and the powder magazine stood directly opposite.

In 1820, the fort was sold at a public auction to the Mobile Lot Company, and demolition started the following year. At this time, a nearby marsh area was partially filled with the materials from the fort.

The Fort Conde-Charlotte specifics are given because it now sits on top of one of the most outstanding features of the current Interstate System in Alabama - the Mobile Tunnel on

Interstate 10. The twin tube tunnel was built beneath the Mobile River, about 400 feet south of the Bankhead Tunnel. Relics of the Fort Conde era were discovered during the excavation in preparation for the construction, when the equipment encountered obstructions which halted the operation. Jim Wilson, Project Engineer, stated in his report, "From the pattern of these obstructions it seems that this area was filled with bulkheads and wharves in the past, and that all of the old timber piling and decking are still in place. Some of the old bulkheads are running perpendicular to the river, while others are at a forty-five degree angle to it." A 1711 map indicated two unnamed wharves in the area; and on a 1815 map these seem to bear the names "King Wharf" and "Montuce Wharf."

The contractor also uncovered, in the same general area, several hand-hewn timbers measuring 12" by 12" with square drift pins. When the 12" by 12" timbers, some with axe marks still visible, were found, maps of Old Mobile were again checked, and it appeared that the place in which they were discovered was the area in which the fort stood. Subsequent archaeological excavations supported the road builders' hypothesis.

In its era Forte Conde-Charlotte occupied a very strategic location, and served its purpose well. But it outlived its usefulness. The location, however, must still be strategic one, since Mobile is one of the fastest-growing cities on the Gulf Coast, and the Interstate System is routed across the same site of the old fort.

During their 1702-1763 tenure, the French also built Fort Tombeckee on the Tombigbee River as a base against the pro-English Chickasaws, and Fort Toulouse at the confluence of the Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers near present day Wetumpka. The latter fort was established as a trading post, a military outpost against the British, and a bar to communication and trade between

the British on the Atlantic coast and the Chichasaws to the west. The British countered the Fort Toulouse move by establishing Fort Okfuski shortly after the founding of Georgia in 1733. As noted earlier, the Treaty of Paris (1763) ending the French and Indian War ceded all of French Louisiana east of New Orleans to England, including the French forts in Alabama.

The British occupied Mobile from 1763 until its conquest by Galvez in 1780. Galvez's gains were consolidated into the Treaty of Paris (1783), which ceded Florida to Spain.

The early Spanish occupation after the Revolution was marked by a boundary conflict with the Americans. The Spanish claimed the area north to 32° 28; and the Americans claimed the land south to 31° (south of the Spanish Fort of St. Stephens). Spain accepted the American claim in Pinckney's Treaty of 1795, and in 1798 the Americans occupied St. Stephens.

The Spanish era was also marked by U.S.-Spanish competition for trade and allies among the Southern Indians. Spanish-supplied Indians attacked American frontier settlements, and the rivalry spilled over into the Creek Indian War, 1813-1814. Young America, however, became too much for distant Spain. Mobile fell to the Americans in 1813 during the War of 1812, and within a decade the area was ceded to the U.S. by the Adams-Onis Treaty. The fourth flag waved over Alabama until Alabama seceded from the United States in 1861.

INDIAN TRAILS AND INDIAN TRADE

Indians roamed this country long before the white man dreamed of its existence. But even before the red man came here the land was inhabited by wildlife. Creatures of the wilderness were the first to etch distinctive traces between their shelters and available natural supplies of food and

water. Thomas Hart Benton, a Missouri Senator for thirty years who supported all legislation aiding the frontier settlers, speaking before the Senate in 1850, recognized that there is a class of topographical engineers older than the schools and more unerring than the mathematicians. They are the wild animals--buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, bears--which traverse the forest not by compass but by an instinct which leads them always the right way--to the lowest passes in the mountains, the shallowest fords in the rivers, the richest pastures in the forests, the best salt springs, and the shortest practicable lines between remote points. They travel thousands of miles, have their annual migrations backwards and forwards, and never miss the best and shortest route.

The Indians often followed the paths of animals in search of food and water. Their trails assured plentiful game and offered the least resistance to travel. Trails on the plains avoided rough, stony ground, briars, and undergrowth; traces in the hills usually followed the ridges where the undergrowth was not so dense nor the streams so numerous. The higher trails also provided points of observation from which the Indians could track their game and view their enemy.

Indian trails promoted communication and commerce between tribes. Whether friendly or hostile, the natives met along the waterways and the time-worn paths through the forest. In times of war they took such routes as would render it hardest for the enemy to detect their presence. Peaceful communications enabled the Indians to barter their goods along established routes with even the most distant tribes and settlers. A Jesuit priest in 1710 identified their wares as "grain, porcelain (wampum), furs, robes, tobacco, mats, canoes, work made of moose or buffalo hair and porcupine quills, cottonbeds, domestic utensils--in a word, all sorts of necessities of life required by them."

Long before this territory was 'settled," a number of white men and mixed breeds

established their trade with Indians. Living among the Indians and adopting their codes, these "Indian countrymen" were some of the most colorful characters ever to inhabit the frontier. Alabama "Indian countrymen" included Benjamin Durant, Abraham Mordecai, John Haigue, Charles Weatherford, and James McGirth. As early as 1786 Benjamin Durant, the champion fighter from South Carolina, farmed the fertile land along the Alabama River west of Montgomery. His wife Sophia commanded respect as the sister of Alexander McGillivray, but Durant also gained recognition from the Creeks for his superior fighting skills. Abraham Mordecai, who traded near the Indian village of Econchate (now Montgomery), was spared his life but lost his ears when caught with a married squaw. John Haigue, the notorious "Savannah Jack," was the "most blood thirsty, fiendish and cruel" mixed breeds to threaten the isolated settlers in South Alabama. He claimed to have enough women and children to form a pool of blood large enough for swimming. Charles Weatherford laid out the first racetrack in east Alabama and James McGirth of Macon County operated the first distillery.

The Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws were the largest Indian tribes in the region. The largest tribe in the Muskhogean family, the Creeks, lived in the southern part of Georgia and Alabama. They were named by the British for the numerous streams in that section of the county. The Cherokees were a powerful tribe of the northern Iroquois family, chiefly residing in the mountainous country of South Caroling, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. The Choctaws of middle and southern Mississippi and western Alabama was another Muskhogean tribe. Their livelihood depended more on agriculture than that of surrounding tribes. The Chickasaws, too, were a Muskhogean tribe, similar in language and customs to the Choctaws, although both were hostile to each other. Their territory was west of the Creek Nation in

northern Mississippi.

These southern Indians, all residing in parts of Alibamo, had among themselves some well defined trails for trade, travel, and communication. The Great Southern Trading and Migration Trail crossed the Apalachicola and Mobile rivers between St. John's River in Florida and the Red River in Louisiana. It was the migration trail used by tribes that moved to Louisiana from south Alabama and Florida when the French lost control of Mobile. The Great Pensacola Trading Path, also known as the Wolf Trail, was a Creek horse path between the Alabama towns in the central part of the state and Pensacola in Florida. The railroad from Montgomery to Pensacola later retraced the old Wolf Trail, on which the Battle of Burnt Corn was fought. The Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, arousing "Red Stick" support against the Americans in 1811, traveled the Upper Creek - Vicksburg Path from north Alabama to the Mississippi River. Extending from Fort Hawkins, near Macon, to the Arkansas River in the Chickasaw Nation, the McIntosh Trail was another route important to travel by the Chickasaw Indians through the Upper Creek country to the Atlantic coast. The Big Trading Path ran from Mobile to the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nation in eastern Mississippi. This same trail was traveled in part by Henri de Tonti in 1702, and was later used as a post road by the Federal government.

The Apalachicola-Alibamo Trail led from the Alibamo towns southeast to the Apalachicola crossing of the Great Migration Trail. This path was the principal route of communication between the Seminoles in north Florida and the Creeks in Alabama. From Mobile another trading path ran northeast to the Indian village Tuckabatchie in central Alabama. The railroad from Mobile to Brewton later followed this Mobile-Tuckabatchie Trading Path. The Alamuchee-Creek Trail crossed the Tombigbee River in Marengo County before continuing

eastward to the present site of Montgomery. De Soto traveled a portion of this route between Montgomery and Cahaba. The Federal Road, which opened in 1805, followed this prehistoric Creek migration route much of the way.

Another path joined Savannah, Georgia with Milliken's Bend on the Mississippi River. The Great Savannah-Mississippi River Trail was one of the longest used by Indians in the South. The Great Charleston-Chickasaw Trail ran through the upper Creek country, crossing the Savannah River at Augusta and the Black Warrior River in Alabama at Cotton Gin Port. Colonel Welsh first traveled this road in 1698, and many English traders soon followed.
The Great Cumberland River War Trail led from the Cumberland settlements in Tennessee south to Hickory Ground on the Coosa River. This was the same route as Jackson Trace, the road Andrew Jackson's soldiers followed to Horseshoe Bend during the Creek Indian War.

Several trails converged at the Great Tombigbee War Crossing at Black Bluff. This was a strategic river crossing for both the Creeks and the Choctaws in their wars. High Town Path proceeded south from east Tennessee to Flat Rock in Franklin County, and then west to the Chickasaw Nation. Another Indian trail led from the Creek crossing on the Tennessee River to Tellico in Monroe County, Tennessee. The portion of this trail between Larkin's Landing in Jackson County and the Tennessee River was later the first public road on which the mail was carried in Marshall County.

All of these trails and many more became roads or improved highways. Hobuckintopa was an old Choctaw village that later became St. Stephens, the first territorial capital of Alabama. A trail connecting it to Mobile is now, for the most part, along the same route at U.S. 43. Alabama Highway 14 between Wetumpka and Tallassee is approximately the same route as the

Fort Toulouse-Lower Creek path. The trail from Walnut Hills on the Mississippi River to Nashville is now the Natchez Trace Parkway. Marie Bankhead Owen, in her Story of Alabama, listed several more trails that have, at one time, been part of Alabama's road system.

When the white man settled the region, he took advantage not only of the Indian's trade, but also their routes of travel. The animal trail that had become a war path soon became a trade route for the French, Spanish, and British in the important to the frontiersmen and played a major role in the westward colonial expansion. The southern colonies did not encounter the mountain barrier that hindered expansion in the north. Charleston on the Eastern seaboard enjoyed a lucrative trade with the Indians, despite the fact that its only access to the frontier and beyond was overland. After 1733 Savannah, also able to accommodate seagoing vessels, but with easier access inland, became the center for commerce with the Indians. Augusta, too, was important to trade, and the trails between these towns and from them into the unsettled territory were improved as trade increased.

Mobile and Pensacola soon developed a lively trade with the Indians, especially in furs. Both had excellent ports to service large ships from other foreign and domestic centers. The favorable geographic position of Mobile Bay at the mouth of the Alabama and Tombigbee River systems was recognized as early as 1763:

"This situation (of Mobile) is well calculated for Indian trade, the town pleasantly situated of the river Mobile, which divides in two branches, each extending near the middle of the Choctaw and Creek Nations, and ... Boats drawing three feet may go all seasons of the year."

New Orleans was similarly situated and, like Mobile, serviced a navigable waterway to facilitate the exchange of goods with other settlements along the rivers. These cities also greatly

increased the use of Indian trails through the wilderness because their greater volume of trade along the rivers encouraged more traffic across the traces in pursuit of a large market.

Better roads were soon recognized as important factors in the commercial development of the frontier. Permission to improve existing trails or, in some instances, construct new roads, was generally acquired by treaty from the Indians. The Chickasaws, on October 24, 1801, agreed to "give leave and permission .... The necessary ferries over the water courses crossed by the said road shall be held and deemed to be the property of the Chickasaw nation." The Choctaws also consented to the improvement of the Natchez Trace, signing a treaty on December 17, 1801, giving permission to build a roadway "through their lands to commence at the northern extremity of the settlement of the Mississippi Territory, and to be extended from thence, by such routes as may be selected and surveyed."

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 stimulated trade and virtually assured American control of a growing market. The trading paths were improved with dispatch to accommodate an established commerce. The bridle-paths of the Indians soon gave way to the wagon roads of the settlers.

Even today many of our roads follow the general routes of the ancient Indian trails, and our bridges cross the near where the earliest settlers crossed. However, in recent years, spurred by the advent of the automobile and the public demand for better roads, there is a greater tendency to ho through such road-building obstacles as large hills rather than to go over or around them. Also, to secure the greater economy of operation made possible by modern earth-moving equipment and other technical and scientific innovations, roads are now built with low grades, few curves, and without grade crossings. Adequate tunnels or bridges are built across

waterways at the points of greatest economic feasibility. Both the Indians and modern engineers strove for the easiest routes to traverse and the shortest distances between two points, but the modern engineer has more and better tools than is aboriginal ancestor. Therefore, he can emphasize the shortest distance and, through greater technology, also make it the easiest.

FRONTIER ROADS

In the territorial days and early statehood of Alabama, many roads simply retraced existing Indian trails, some linked Washington, D.C. and New Orleans with the pioneer outposts that lay between, but all served a major role in the development of the "Old Southwest." Some of the more significant frontier roads in this era were the Natchez Trace (1801), Federal Road (1805), Gaines Trace (1810), Jackson Trace (1813), Jackson's Military Road (1815), Bearmeat Cabin Road (1818), Byler Road (1819), Cheatham Road (1824), and Three Notch Road (1824).

Natchez Trace

What became known as the "Natchez Trace" was once just a natural trail used by herds of buffalo in their annual migration from the mountain ridges of Tennessee to the Mississippi Valley. Choctaw, Natchez, and Chickasaw Indians also used the trail, but it was of little consequence until after the American Revolution when the city of Natchez, the capital of the Mississippi Territory, became U.S. property.

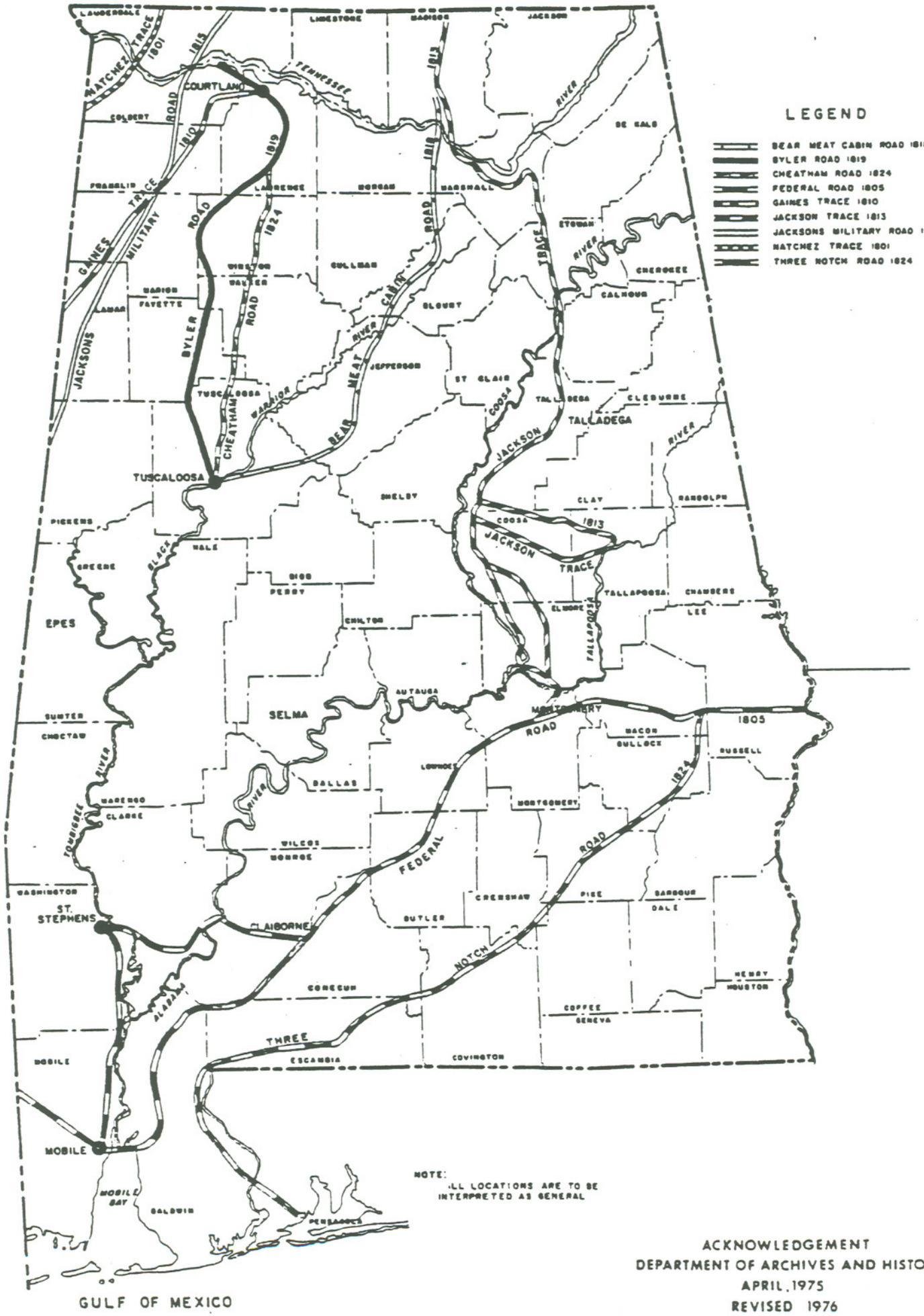
Early settlers and merchants had no trouble getting to Natchez from Nashville (the closest American village to Natchez) via the Cumberland, Ohio, and Mississippi Territory, became U.S.

property. The return trip upriver, however, was much more difficult, encouraging the development of an overland route. As both settlements grew, there was an increasing need for a more efficient system of transportation and communication linking Natchez to Nashville. While not the shortest route, the Natchez Trace was the only all-weather land route from the territorial outpost to the Tennessee settlement.

Mail was first carried south from Nashville on the Trace in 1796, and by 1800 post riders delivered the mail between Nashville and Natchez on a regular basis, covering the five hundred miles of wilderness in about three weeks. The establishment of postal service for the region alerted the government to the hazards and perils of travel on the trail so, with the permission of the Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians, the military began work in 1801 to improve the road. In 1806 the road was further improved to encourage trade and travel.

In negotiating the treaty to improve the road, George Colbert, a shrewd Chickasaw chief who was part Scotch, reserved for the Indians the right to operate ferries, knowing that ferries were the most reliable way to cross difficult streams and rivers at that time. His own ferry crossed the Tennessee River at the mouth of Bear Creek, and charging a dollar for each horse and rider, he soon became a wealthy man. For more than twenty years Colbert operated his ferry, until it became unprofitable after completion of the road through Florence. Other Indians and half-breeds also operated ferries across the Tennessee (the greatest single obstacle to travel on the entire Natchez Trace) until their enterprises met the same fate as Colbert's.

Only thirty-two miles of the original trace were in Alabama. Most of the Alabama section was abandoned when roads leading to more populous settlements such as Jackson and Columbus, Mississippi, and Florence, Alabama, was improved. With the development of the steamboat,


LEGEND
BEAR MEAT CABIN ROAD 1818
BYLER ROAD 1819
CHEATHAM ROAD 1824
FEDERAL ROAD 1805
GAINES TRACE 1810
JACKSON TRACE 1813
JACKSONS MILITARY ROAD 1815
NATCHEZ TRACE 1801
THREE NOTCH ROAD 1824
NOTE: ALL LOCATIONS ARE TO BE INTERPRETED AS GENERAL
GULF OF MEXICO
TUSCALOOSA
TALLADEGA
SELMA
MOBILE
ST. STEPHENS
EPES
COURTLAND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
APRIL, 1975
REVISED 1976

which permitted relatively quick upstream transportation from Natchez to Nashville, the Trace had even less traffic. The Natchez Trace was a vital communication link between the American frontier and the Old Southwest in the 1790s and early 1800s, but it was soon relegated to the role of serving the needs of the local environment.

FEDERAL ROAD

As early as 1707 the British out of Charleston and the Spanish traders from Pensacola traveled from their respective settlements over the same ancient Indian path through the wilderness. Rapid colonial expansion during the next century was such that, when the new American government obtained rights to this territory on the Gulf, one of its first interests was the availability of easy routes of travel.

Henry Dearborn, U.S. Secretary of War during Jefferson's administration, and William McIntosh, head of a delegation of Creek chiefs, met in Washington on November 14, 1805 to secure unmolested access to the primitive trails for the ever increasing influx of travelers. The Creek Nation surrendered to the Federal Government certain lands on the Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers in Georgia, and granted permission forever for the use of an improved horsepath through their country, following the Indians ancient "Middle Trading Path." In return, the Creeks were to receive $11,000 per year in cash for the next ten years, and $12,000 a year in either money, goods, or farm supplies (at their option) for the following eight years. The Creeks agreed to provide boats for ferriage across the rivers and streams, and to establish suitable accommodations for travelers. The prices for these conveniences were to be regulated by the Agent for Indian Affairs, Colonel Benjamin Hawkins.

The path followed a natural watershed from the old Creek Agency in Georgia to St.

Stephens, the territorial capital of Mississippi and later of Alabama. The only large streams the trail cut across within the present boundaries of the state were Uchee Creek in Russell County and Line Creek in Montgomery County. Both streams required ferries, but neither gave any difficulty to the traveler.

In 1811 the U. S. Government enlarged the road to accommodate vehicular transportation, but only with the consent of the Indians (who again received substantial pay in return). Army engineers were detailed to cut the road, which served the military well during wars with the Indians and the British during the next few years.

The mail was delivered from New York to New Orleans once a week over the road on horseback and, by 1820, regular deliveries between Montgomery and Milledgeville, the capital of Georgia, followed this route, the old Federal Road turned southwest before reaching Montgomery, but the stage going east joined the road near Mt. Meigs. The first stagecoach to bring mail to Montgomery arrived in April 1821, and by 1826 there were three competing firms bringing the mail from the east to this young town on the Alabama River. The establishment of a regular mail route from Fort Mitchell to St. Stephens in 1818 played no small role in the rapid growth of the city of Montgomery.

Peter Brannon, writing in the 1930's about early travel in Alabama, explained that, with the establishment of a regular mail route and the increase in trade and travel, "houses of entertainment" flourished along the road to accommodate the weary. Before long, inns and taverns stretched the entire length of the Federal Road, averaging about sixteen miles distance between them. Dinner at these inns, for which a traveler paid as much as seventy-five cents, often might consist of turnip soup, roast beef, roast turkey, venison with sour sauce, roast chicken, pork

roasted with sweet potatoes, chicken pie, ham, five vegetables, pudding and sauce, sweet pies, preserved fruits, a dessert of strawberries and plums, and wine with brandy. The finer taverns also served both white bread and Indian bread.

Between Milledgeville and St. Stephens the road passed through Fort Hawkins, Fort Mitchell, Fort Bainbridge, Fort Hull, Fort Dale, Fort Crawford, Fort Montgomery, and Fort Mims. Travel was always precarious, and many incidents of humor or poignancy were later recounted about journeys through the wilderness. In 1836 the proprietor of Royster's Inn at Sand Fort in Russell County was forced to live for more than a week on bread made with whiskey, because he was under constant attach by the Indians and unable to get water from the nearby spring. James Struat, a wealthy Scot traveling through the Old Southwest, recalled in his diary the difficulties of travel on the Federal Road. Between Forts Mitchell and Bainbridge, a distance of about twenty-nine miles, the distinguished gentleman's coach was overturned eight times. Thomas Hamilton, who transversed the Federal Road from Mobile to Augusta in 1831, noted that the road was "what is expressively called a natural one, and lay through a continuous pine forest." He continued, "I have had occasion to say a great deal about roads in these volumes, but I pronounce that along which our route lay on the present occasion to be positively, comparatively, and superlatively the very worst I have ever traveled.... The ruts were axle-deep, and there were occasionally huge crevices, in which, but for a great strategy on the part of the coachman, the vehicle must have been engulfed."

Although the 460 mile trip from Augusta to Mobile still took about two weeks, the Federal Road was a vital link between the population centers on the Eastern seaboard and those developing on the Gulf Coast. This federally "improved" road that traced the Indians' ancient

Middle Trading Path was an important artery for colonial expansion into Alabama and beyond.

GAINES TRACE

Early French Settlers, recognizing the need for a transportation link between north and south Alabama, at one time considered the possibility of a canal between the Tennessee and Tombigee Rivers. That need was later intensified when Florida officials, vying with the settlers for the lucrative Indian trade, required shippers of American goods through Mobile to pay excessive Spanish taxes. For instance, a barrel of flour costing four dollars in Natchez cost four times as much by the time it reached St. Stephens or Fort Stoddert in the lower Tombigee area.

A canal between the rivers was not practical, but a wagon road linking Muscle Shoal on the Tennessee to Cotton Gin Port on the Tombigee would serve the same purpose. In December of 1807, General Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War, instructed Edmund Pendleton Gaines to survey a feasible route for travel. Gaines, the Commandant of Fort Stoddert, recommended improving an old Indian trail between the two points and reported that the Chickasaws approved such a plan.

Not until 1810, however, was there any attempt to gain formal approval from the Indians for improving their trail. In October of that year George Strother Gaines, the younger brother of E.P. Gaines and the Factor of St. Stephens, was appointed to negotiate the treaty. By this time, the Chickasaws were reluctant to concede to the transportation of the white man, and only allowed Americans to use their trail as a horse path, not as a wagon road. Despite this temporary setback, however, the Trace was opened to white traders and settlers in late 1810 and successfully eased the cost and increased the flow of goods to and from those pioneer settlements on the lower Tombigbee River. Indeed, the Gaines Trace played no small part in the economic development of

the southern frontier in the early 1800's.

JACKSON TRACE

In 1813 General Andrew Jackson traveled south from Tennessee on a mission that would not only decisively defeat the Creeks, but also gain Spanish and British recognition of the rights of the new republic. He followed the Great Cumberland River Trail from Fayetteville, Tennessee, to the mouth of the Coosa River in the Mississippi Territory. For six months the Upper Creek Indians engaged his men in battle until, on November 9, 1813, he defeated a large force of Creeks in the Battle of Talladega. After Another confrontation at Emuckfau, "Old Hickory" finally met the main body of Indian warriors at Horseshoe Bend on March 27, 1814. Jackson's decisive victory there broke the backbone of the Creek Confederacy and opened the remaining wilderness of the Mississippi Territory to trade and travel by white settlers.

Though Jackson's main body of volunteers returned to Tennessee forthwith, John Coffee's troops traveled south along the trace with the 39th U.S. Infantry to establish a garrison at a post named for one of the men killed at Horseshoe Bend, Major Lemuel P. Montgomery. While residing at the fort, the engineer of the Tennessee Volunteers, Major Howell Tatum, conducted the first topographical survey of any Alabama waterway, that of the Alabama River.

Andrew Jackson, recently promoted to Commander-in-Chief of the Southern division of the U.S. Army, returned the following summer to conclude the Indian land cession now known as the Treaty of Fort Jackson (the French-built Fort Toulouse having been renamed in the General's honor) on August 9, 1814. He traveled the same "Jackson Trace" south from Tennessee as before, and was joined at Fort Jackson by the troops who followed him to Pensacola and New Orleans.

JACKSON'S MILITARY ROAD

Following his 1815 victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans, General Jackson returned to Tennessee by cutting across the northwest corner of Alabama, intersecting the Gaines Trace near the boundary of Franklin and Marion Counties. Portions of that early highway were "improved" before Jackson's march back home. On April 27, 1816, Congress appropriated money to repair and maintain the entire route, as it was 220 miles shorter than the other major road connecting the Tennessee Valley to the Mississippi Valley - the Natchez Trace.

Jackson's Military Road was built by troops of the First and Eighth Infantries primarily to serve military purposes. Work on the road commenced in the summer of 1817 and was finished by January 1820. The roadbed was about twelve yards wide, with but a few feet of right-of-way on either side.

Many villages in northwest Alabama, such as Russellville in Franklin County, was first settled by soldiers from Tennessee returning to claim the good land they had seen on their victory march from New Orleans in 1815. Jackson's Military Road served more than its prescribed purpose as an artery of military logistics; it opened the wilderness between the Tennessee and Mississippi valleys, including western Alabama, to settlement and development.

BEARMEAT CABIN ROAD

Bearmeat Cabin Road was named for a Cherokee chief whose cabin was located near present-day Blountsville. This particular road was also known as the Huntsville Road. It was originally an Indian trail leading from Ditto's Landing on the Tennessee River to Mud Town on the Caaba. The road was a fairly good one for the time since Jackson, during the War of 1812, enlarged and improved it. A Huntsville merchant traveling the road in 1816 described it as "a

road three-fifths of which is level and the balance not much broken; not more than three hills of consequence are recollected, and a four horse team can easily draw two thousand weight uses either of them." The Bearmeat Cabin Road went through about fifteen miles of Cherokee land before continuing southeast towards the Caaba. The first white settlers in the area were John Jones and his brother-in-law, Caleb Fryley, both of Madison County. Jones and Fryley arrived in 1815, and by 1820 the frontier was settled by nearly five thousand people. Subsequent heavy traffic on this "lonely rocky road" pounded the troublesome rocks into red dust and iron ore, indicating the mineral possibilities of the area. A significant factor in the early development of the north Alabama hill country, the Bearmeat Cabin Road helped tame the wilderness and ease migration in the Alabama territory before 1820.

BYLER ROAD

Only two days after the state of Alabama was admitted to the Union, the Legislature authorized the construction of a road from Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River south to Tuscaloosa. William Wyatt Bibb, the first Governor of Alabama, approved the act in Huntsville on December 16, 1819. John Byler was directed to build the first state road, clearing all stumps and roots for a width of twelve feet, for which he could collect the following rates of toll: seventy-five cents for a four-wheeled carriage and team; fifty cents for a two-wheeled carriage; twelve and a half cents (one bit) for a man and his horse; six and a fourth cents for each pack horse; one cent per head of cattle; and half a cent for each head of hogs or sheep. Anyone caught going through or around the turnpike without paying the toll was required to "forfeit and pay for every such offense, triple the amount by them due to the said John Byler."

The legislative act establishing the road was amended at Caaba on June 16, 1821. It

allowed the collection of one dollar for passage of a four-wheeled carriage, and a five dollar penalty (plus the amount due) for evading the toll.

Connecting the Tennessee River with the Warrior-Tombigbee Rivers, this road facilitated travel between Tuscaloosa and Nashville and was significant in the development of the surrounding area. When Tuscaloosa became the capital of Alabama in 1826, the Byler Road was, as ex-state Senator Emmett Oden of Russellville has dubbed it, the "Main Street of Northwest Alabama."

CHEATHAM ROAD

Soon after completion of the Byler Road, Wyatt Cheatham saw that a more direct route from Moulton south to Tuscaloosa would better serve the needs of those residing in the hills of Walker and Winton counties. An 1824 Act of the Alabama Legislature authorized Cheatham to clear a twelve foot roadbed with an eighteen foot right-of-way "beginning at a point on Payne's road, about seven miles south of Moulton in Lawrence County, and running thence in a direction toward Tuscaloosa, the nearest and best way for a good road." A portion of Alabama Highway 33, north of Moreland, still follows this frontier road.

THREE NOTCH ROAD

The Three Notch Road, or "Three Chopped Way," was designated as such because of the triple gashes on trees left by the surveyor and advance party marking the route. Many early roads were marked the same way, including the Federal Road when it was cleared for wagons in 1811.

The primary purposes of the Three Notch Road was to expedite communication and transportation between military posts at Pensacola and Fort Mitchell. Secretary of War John Eaton, in a memorandum to the House of Representatives on the construction of military roads

dated January 13, 1831, described the road as: "Whole length of the road, 233 miles; portion constructed by the Army, 233 miles; period of construction, commenced in June and completed in August 1824; authority by which constructed, order of the War Department, with a view to facilitate military construction; cost of the rod, $1,138.78."

The authority to construct the road was verified in the following letter:

Quartermaster General's Office
April 12, 1824

Sir:

On the 1st instant I received your letter dated the 7th, ultimo. The Secretary of War, to whom your letter was submitted approves entirely of our views in relation to the road from Pensacola to Fort Mitchell, and directs that you commence your operations, should the season now be so far advanced as to endanger the health of the troops, as soon as your other duties will allow of your absence from Pensacola. The route by Sherlock's ferry, for the reasons which you have stated, is considered preferable to that by Beeler's ferry.

You will make such a road as to admit with facility the movements of carriages, carts, and wagons cause substantial wooden bridges to be erected over all the principle streams on the route which shall not require ferries. The commanding officer at Pensacola will be instructed to furnish a subaltern's command for this service, which will be under your orders.

It is desirable that the work be performed as early and at as little expense as possible.

I am, sir, &c.,

Thomas S. Jessup,
Quartermaster General.

Captain D. E. Burch
Assistant Quartermaster, Pensacola

Much of the Three Notch Road marked by the surveyor, Captain D.E. Burch, was along existing Indian trails, although some new paths were cleared for the route. Only short sections of the old road are still in use, a portion being Three Notch Street in the city of Troy. The name is perpetuated, however, by a small village in Bullock County southeast of Union Springs.

Thus, the route selections of the early roadbuilders of Alabama proved wise ones as some

current roads parallel many of the earliest roads of the State. Highway planning in Alabama has become more systematic with the creation of the Alabama Highway Department in 1911 and its subsequent development, as well as Federal involvement in road financing since 1916. Twentieth century Alabamians have contributed greatly to the current development of the State road system, but they still owe a debt to Andrew Jackson, the Gaines brothers, John Byler, Wyatt Cheatham, and other early road builders of Alabama.

FRONTIER AND ANTEBELLUM TRAVEL: LIFE IN ALABAMA A CENTURY AND HALF AGO

It is difficult for someone living in the contemporary world of automobiles, airplanes, guided missiles, space satellites, and interplanetary exploration to conceive of the primitive nature of Alabama society less than two centuries ago. Only in this primitive setting, however, can the frontier and antebellum transportation system and its institutions be understood and appreciated.

A century and a half ago Alabama was a frontier. The society in the age of our great-great grandfathers was a society in which a man's rifle and axe and a women's spinning wheel, cards and loom, and iron pot were the ingredients of easy living; when salt and coffee were luxuries, the former almost indispensable and the latter to be used only when special guests were in the household; when the home was no more than a small cabin of one or two rooms, sparsely furnished with crude furniture turned out by the chief manufacturer of most of the family's possessions - the master of the house; when the family's clothing was homemade and "Sunday clothes" were dyed homespuns; when a major road was "twelve feet wide and clear of stumps and roots" and a toll of $ .12 ½ cents had to be paid by horseback riders unless they took a "stole"